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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4820  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 0051  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 6693  
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA IMMEDIATE 5461  
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA IMMEDIATE 7790  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE IMMEDIATE 9270  
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO IMMEDIATE 5978  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI IMMEDIATE 7425  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEATRS/TREASURY DEPT WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/USFJ IMMEDIATE  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 001686

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/24/2019

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SUBJECT: HISTORIC LOWER HOUSE ELECTION SET FOR AUGUST 30

REF: TOKYO 1588

Classified By: CDA JAMES P. ZUMWALT, REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: With the July 21 Diet dissolution, the stage has been set for Japan's first general election since September 2005. Although campaigning is to begin on August 18, most politicians in the House of Representatives have already started to make preparations for the historic race on August 30, which will determine whether Prime Minister Aso's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) can remain in power after more than fifty years of nearly uninterrupted rule or the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) can achieve a change of government. Better than average cooperation among the opposition parties and recent public opinion polls do not bode well for Aso and the LDP. End summary.

ELECTION KICK-OFF  
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12. (C) Soon after the Lower House dissolution on July 21, and despite the fact that the official campaign period for the August 30 election does not begin until August 18, most Diet members have already headed to their districts to begin election preparations. At stake for the opposition is a chance to end more than five decades of nearly unbroken rule by the ruling LDP. Polling indicates that a record percentage of voters plan to vote in this election, and media coverage of the election has been intense.

BIG RULING PARTY NAMES FACE RETIREMENT, DEFEAT  
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13. (C) Adding to the sense of historic change with this election have been the announcements that a number of big names in the LDP will not seek re-election. Among them are Lower House Speaker Yohei Kono, former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, former Health and Welfare Minister Yuji Tsushima, and former Defense Ministers Tsutomu Kawara and Tokuichiro Tamazawa. Other senior party members may not have as graceful an exit from the political stage. In Nagasaki, 68 year-old former Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma is facing a spirited and much publicized challenge from 28 year-old Eriko Fukuda, a plaintiff in a successful lawsuit for victims of Hepatitis C caused by tainted blood products. Well known for her tenacious fight against the government bureaucracy and

supported by the opposition DPJ, Fukuda is popular among a public increasingly frustrated with politics as usual in the capital.

¶4. (C) Other LDP bigwigs who are competing against much younger DPJ-backed candidates include former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori and former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki. Acting Chairman of the LDP's Election Headquarters Makoto Koga, former LDP Vice President Taku Yamasaki, and former Finance Minister Shoichi Nakagawa also face very close contests against younger DPJ opponents. With prominent party leaders having retired or facing the prospect of defeat, the August election could very well bring in a large number of new faces in the Diet.

#### LOWER HOUSE 101

¶5. (C) The Japanese House of Representatives, also called the Lower House, consists of 480 seats. 300 of these seats are for single-seat constituencies (called shossenkyoku, or "small electoral districts," in Japanese), where voters choose one preferred candidate from a list of competing individuals). The other 180 seats of the Lower House are proportional representation seats, for which each voter picks either an individual candidate or a political party to represent a constituency that is a larger, regional block than the shossenkyoku. Out of the 480 total seats, 241 provides a majority. As of the dissolution of the Lower

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House on July 21, 303 Diet members were from the LDP, 112 from the DPJ, 31 from the LDP's coalition partner the New Komeito Party, 9 from the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), 7 from the Social Democratic Party (SDP), 5 from the People's New Party (PNP), and 1 each from the New Party Daichi and the Japan Renaissance Party. Some 9 members were independents, and 2 seats were vacant.

#### OPPOSITION COOPERATION

¶6. (C) Given the possibility that neither the LDP nor DPJ will win an outright majority, smaller parties such as the SDP, PNP, and JCP, as well as independents, may be an important factor in the power structure and balance in the new Lower House. DPJ President Yukio Hatoyama has stated that even if the DPJ were to obtain a majority, his party would cooperate with other parties to consolidate power. Already, cooperation between opposition parties has been evident. For example, in the 300 single-seat constituencies, the DPJ has cooperated more closely than in the past with the smaller opposition parties to ensure that opposition votes do not get diluted and ultimately benefit the LDP. The number of districts where DPJ politicians are in competition with candidates with not only the LDP but also the other opposition parties decreased from 46 in 2005 to 14 this year. Also this year, the DPJ is not fielding candidates in 26 districts where they have agreed to have other opposition parties field their candidates in the name of a united opposition (compared to 7 such districts last year).

#### POLLS SHOW DPJ IN GOOD POSITION

¶7. (C) Election polls and simulations have saturated Japanese media in recent weeks. Though PM Aso appears to have solidified his status as party leader going into the election, this has not helped his approval ratings, which hover around 20% in most surveys. Another bad sign for the LDP is that disapproval of the Aso administration has caused the party itself to lose support. In one past instance, even when less than 10% of the public supported the LDP-led Mori

Cabinet, the party itself still enjoyed a better than 2-to-1 advantage in support over its DPJ rival. Recent polls, however, show that the DPJ has leap-frogged the LDP in support for the first time in history, and were the election held today, voters would choose the DPJ over the LDP 40% to 25%.

ZUMWALT